

Week 7 | Pursuing Simplicity in Ourselves

Overview

Throughout this study we have spent most of our time and efforts recognizing and reacting to areas of our lives where simplicity is needed based on the “visible” consequences of our actions... busyness, consumerism, negative effects on environment, overextended and tattered relationships with loved ones, negative and idle speech, etc. During this process, you might already be feeling both the freedom associated with the changes you have incorporated into your life, as well experiencing new challenges as you start living a different, simpler life. Allow the newly experienced freedom in your life to fuel you to continue. To resist the temptation to return to old habits and make others happy, we need to remember that practicing simplicity opens up a richer, more fulfilling, creative life.

But pursuing holistic simplicity can't just begin and end with a simpler outward lifestyle. No, it is also essential that the pursuit of simplicity has to confront and change our inward realities. Unfortunately, dealing with and simplifying the inward reality is where many who desire simplicity stop short. The reason for this is, quite frankly, it's deemed too difficult. It requires - relentless desire and effort on our part to pursue simplification of the soul, to purge the internal clutter and strip away whatever prevents us from seeing ourselves so simply and wonderfully made. Simplifying ourselves necessitates letting go of wounds, grudges, anger, and anything that would harm us. It means deliberately saying no to false humility and negative self-talk and embracing grace, healing, and hope. Dealing with and simplifying the inward reality is dirty, painful, and exhaustive, and is seldom clear cut, straightforward, or obvious.

Despite these hurdles, it is essential we spend some time in this area during the course of this study, because simplifying our inner reality is at the core of the spiritual discipline of simplicity.

Now, you might be asking why we didn't start this study with a healthy evaluation, cleansing, and simplification of self. And, this is a valid question. The decision for waiting later in this study to breach this topic was based on two main reasons. First, the desire to simplify ourselves is directly connected to our perception of reality. If we are unaware of our consequences of our actions - whether that is towards self, others, or the environment- we have little reason to initiate positive change in our lives. Second, dealing with our inner realities is by far the most difficult aspect of pursuing simplicity. Starting the study with trying to simplify our inner realities might have proved too much for many of us to tolerate, even if it is at the heart of our ability to simplify our lifestyles, commitments, our speech, and our relationships.

Pursuing simplicity in our inward realities is by no means easy and it cannot and should not be undertaken lightly. And, this is process will take much, much longer than the duration of this study...years if not our entire lives. But, with simplicity of self come freedom and relief—and the opportunity to give our best selves and focused attention to God and the people we love. For this, it is definitely worth pursuing!

Weekly Readings and Media

Re-read the attached chapter from Richard Foster's book *Celebration of Discipline*, paying particular attention to pages 79-81, which discusses the importance of the inward reality, and pages 85-89, which describes how focusing on the kingdom of God produces the right inward reality. It is also provided it in Czech.

Read the attached document titled “True and False Simplicity” by François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon.

Read the attached article titled “The Power of Simplicity” by Coen Vonk.

Read the attached document titled “How to Care for Your Soul” by Shawn Young.

Read the following scriptures:

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 (New International Version)

Then Jesus went to work on his disciples. "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for? Mathew 16:25 (The Message)

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. Romans 12:1 (The Message)

Assignments

Perhaps no other assignment in this study is more personal than this week because no one knows other than you where change is needed in your inner reality. As a result of this, this week's assignment is only one thing: to reflect on the weekly readings and try to identify the areas where you need to “be changed from the inside out”. In other words, what areas in your life are holding you back from developing a true sense of yourself in the image and likeness of God? Only when we are aware of these areas will we be able to allow God to bring out the best out of us.

Included in this week is also the daily prayer and the weekly journaling.

Disclaimer About This Study

Remember, this study is focused on:

- learning to “seek first the Kingdom of God” in every aspect of our lives,
- trying to invoke desire for us as seekers of the Truth to start practicing the spiritual discipline of simplicity in all areas of our lives,
- aimed at helping us to better recognize the everyday gestures of God,
- discover an inner peace and joy we can share with others that cannot be found in the life that culture is advertising and offering, and is
- intended to show that simplicity in our physical and spiritual lives with God is readily accessible to everyone.

This study is **not** intended to:

- provide a framework on how to practice the spiritual discipline of simplicity,
- state how simplicity is achieved, or
- encompass all of the areas where simplicity is either apparent or needed in our physical, emotional, and spiritual lives.

“There is that near you which will guide you. O wait for it and be sure you keep to it.” Isaac Pennington, 1678